

## VIOLENCE BEGETS VIOLENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*This research looks at Aravind Adiga's novel The White Tiger where Adiga focuses on a society where violence reigns freely and his protagonist Balram Halwai struggles to survive in the face of this cruelty. In such a social order, where corruption is at its peak, violence becomes a social norm and those who live under its influence start to accept it as a part of life. They not only observe violent behavior inflicted before them or on them, but they also incorporate it into their own lives. Such a person feels frustrated and this aggravation turns into a need to inflict further pain on others. It is a cry for help as one seeks to look for justification for his own misery but gets caught up in this endless cycle of discontentment and brutality. This article proves the hypothesis that violence indeed does beget further violence as when a person undergoes severe violence of different types; he finally accepts it as a part of his own personality and hence lashes out on the society that made him a victim of social and political corruption.*

**KEYWORDS:** Violence, Cruelty, Corruption, Victim, Discontentment, & Brutality

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### INTRODUCTION

According to the American Psychological Association, *Violence* is an extreme form of aggression such as assault, rape or murder. Another source describes *Violence* as a behaviour, in which physical force is exerted for the purpose of causing damage or injury. Its definition has been continuously evolving with time and circumstances. Now days it is a very common issue, modern philosophers not only condemn it but some of them are even supporting the concept. Modern thinkers believe that use of *Violence* in order to defend ourselves should be permissible. All the powerful nations follow this idea that they need to use *Violence* to restore peace in the world.

Not only philosophers but the subject of *Violence* has caught the attraction of psychologists. Gilligan in *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (1996) said that, "*Violence like charity begins at home,*" he believes that *Violence is instilled in a human being first at home level, where lack of love causes feeling of rejection and shame and then through that individual into society*".

The main idea of thesis is *Violence begets Violence*, or hate begets hate which means that it is a mirror action one act of *Violence* will result in another act of *Violence* and then there is no stopping. This concept has been adapted from The Holy Bible St. Mathew, Verse-26:52-The passage tells about a disciple drawing a sword to defend against the arrest of Jesus Christ, but was stopped to do so: "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said, "For all who draw the sword will die by the sword."

After philosophers and psychologists our literature writers cannot ignore this subject. It is represented in all forms of arts and literary works from the cave paintings to literature to present day media. From Homeric's

works to Beowulf, from Sophocles to Dante, from Shakespeare to Melville. This theme is also present in Richard Wright's "The Native Son" and in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eyes". Especially after the world wars there is a dire need not only to understand man's obsession with *Violence* but also to understand its causes and remedies.

In this research we are going to study the effects of different types of *Violence* faced these days by an unprivileged man such as physical, emotional, psychological and financial violence. In *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga shows how Balram Halwai (protagonist), uses the aid of injustice in a society that nurtures on violence. Adiga reflects on how Balram Halwai, after facing such abuse, uses the same device, in order to escape violence. He justifies himself:

I'll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi

I slit my master's throat. I'll say it was all

Worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an

Hour, just for a minute, what it is not to be a

Servant. (321)

This is a qualitative research, with content analysis method. The research was conducted through close study of the text and by the deep examination of the character of Balram Halwai, to analyze the effect of violence on his character. This article proves that, violence sets in a cyclical motion, where one act leads to another.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been said and written on Aravind Adigas, *The White Tiger*. Many writers have tried, to examine the character of Balram Halwai, his quest for identity and his will to improve his status. Most of the writers described it as divide between the rich and the poor. One such article "Poor -Rich Divide", by Dr. A J Sebastian focuses on social and economic aspect of the novel. He claims that Balram is a "representative of the poor in India." (2) He believes Balram, to be "an entrepreneur, but also a roguish criminal" who always has "self – justification". The researcher proves his point, by giving statistical data and representing facts and figures, of poverty ratio in India. He talks about the class stratification and how these differences affect lower classes. In this context, she analyses the despotic behavior of upper classes with their subordinates. He uses plenty of quotations from the text, showing how Ashok Sharma, the master, treats Balram Halwai, his driver. He also shows the working of Balram's mind and in order to prove his point, he also tries to apply Jennifer Copley's Theory of Psychopathy. However, he seems to change his mind very abruptly, as he does not discuss the theory in detail. In his attempt to focus mainly on financial aspect, he ignores the psychological side of the problem.

In the article "Balram's Quest for Freedom in Adiga's *The White Tiger* R. Renuka Narasman focuses on the prevailing social conditions of India and how Balram despite being in "darkness" (low - caste) finds his way into the "light." She blames the "corruption," "injustice," and the "inequality" present in the society, which enforces the man to commit a "criminal act". She also emphasizes on class differences. In this aspect, this article is quite similar to the previous one, as she also mentions the psychopathic theory, but she also fails to elaborate on it, to support her piece with substantial evidence. She seems more concerned with the plot of the novel. Although, she discusses the story thoroughly and gives economic and social reasons, for the moral degradation of the lower class, she fails to do so convincingly.

Dr. Mukesh Yadav's article "The Un (changing) India" is a social critique, in which he talks about "Gandhi's India". He is more concerned about the failure of Indian political and social system. In his paper, he explores different methods and ideas to improve the economic, political and social system of the country. He greatly emphasizes on the lack of education but he hardly seems interested in literary aspect of the novel.

Similarly, M. Poonkadi in his article "The Voice of Servility and Dominance through Animal Imagery in Adiga's *The White Tiger*" explores the text by giving it a "close reading". His main purpose is, to highlight the class differences by drawing attention on Adiga's use, of animal imagery. He discusses Adiga's "distinctive narrative technique, that compliments his theme, delivered through scattered imagery, especially selected from animal kingdom". (186) this single-mindedness of his purpose gives limited scope to his work.

Most of the articles written on Adiga's novel are researched by Indian scholars. One such scholar, Amitava Kumar, seems to be quite disappointed by Adiga, his main concern being Adiga's misrepresentation of India. He believes that, due to Adiga's long stay abroad, he has presented a biased and twisted image of India. His main focus is India's image, rather than any literary issue. Some other works done by Indian researchers, seems to concentrate more on post-colonial aspects and have discussed the novel, in the perspective of "colonizer and colonized".

In this article the researcher discusses more or less the same themes, but places greater emphasis on the concept of violence. The role of violence is discussed in context to its effect, on an unprivileged person like Balram. This study shows, how different types of violence like physical, psychological and financial violence affect the protagonist Balram and how, such cruelties lead him to commit acts of violence of his own. The ample proof given through the close textual study, strongly advocates the hypothesis that hate begets hate or more accurately, violence begets violence.

### **Violence Begets Violence**

Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* revolves around the wrongs in the Indian social order and tells the story of the becoming of a man, Balram Halwai, in a society that fosters violence and corruption. Adiga, employs dark humor and powerful imagery, to create a character in Balram who is not only a victim of the injustices of society, but is also a replica of the same device, that created him. He represents the cyclical nature of violence in its most dominant forms (physical, psychological and financial), as the suffering he endures becomes a part of his personality and creates a man, with strong insecurities and a deeply rooted identity crisis.

The violence endured by Balram, varied in its type but seemed to have come from all corners, throughout his life. Adiga, through the fragments from Balram's past, builds a mosaic of instances, where corruption reigned supreme. With every new episode, the reader starts to get a clear picture of the life a poor man in India leads, surrounded by discrimination, fraud and cruelty.

The first instance of violence in the novel, is the physical violence. Physical violence can be defined as violence that "occurs when someone uses a part of their body or an object to control a person's actions." Such violence can involve physical force that is aimed to cause pain or distress in another person. It can include the use of weapons or restraints. The most extreme form of physical violence is the act of murder.

In *The White Tiger*, physicality is emphasized on time and time again. Whether it aims to emphasize violence or to draw comparisons, Adiga uses stark physical imagery to make his point throughout. In the novel, physical violence is not directly carried out, on Balram Halwai. It is imposed on those around him and hence, forms a basic part of Balram's

nature as it is a vice, that he has been exposed to, since his childhood. The first example of such violence is the incident of his mother's death, as told by Balram Halwai. It is not the death itself or the feelings of loss, that Balram explains in his relation of this event, but it is the image of brutality, his mother's body endured after dying.

I watched my mother as the fire ate away the satin, a pale foot  
jerked out, like a living thing; the toes which were melting in  
the heat began to curl up, offering resistance to what was being  
done to them. Kusum shoved the foot into the fire, but it would  
not burn. My heart began to race. My mother wasn't going to  
let them destroy her. (Adiga, 17)

Adiga uses this extremely vivid image, to imply a number of things. He builds on the theme of cruelty and dehumanization and Balram reduces the final memory of his mother, to a description of her "corpse" burning. This reflects the peak of violence as even after death, the human body suffers intensely. The "pale foot" that jolts out represents the struggle of the victimized human, trying to break free of the agony inflicted on it. It is symbolic of the life itself as it fights to exist despite the pain and the forceful torture.

The vocabulary used here, which includes words like "melting", "curl up", "shoved" and "destroy", amplify the notion of a forceful energy deliberately imposing its strength to harm the body. The foot's "resistance" to burn, acts as an analogy for Balram's mother's battle, to survive the corruption that was being carried out on her. The entire image speaks volumes about the brutality of the society as it reduces a human being to a pile of ashes. It is also reflective of the fact that no matter how hard the body tries, it would never be able to break free of the violence that is inflicted on it.

This memory is the first one amongst a series which are narrated by Balram. Its placing in the novel, further accentuates the fact that, one of the foremost concerns of the novel is physical violence and the impact it has on Balram. The clarity of this memory as reflected by the detailed description of the scene, shows how strongly the event influenced him. Exposure to such violence in an age as young as "six or seven or eight years old", can lead to the acceptance of such behaviour, as the norm in the child. Hence, from a very young age, Balram was not only familiar with physical violence, but he was also made to believe that, this sort of violence is normal and is an accepted and expected part of the Indian culture.

Furthermore, this scene results in Balram fainting, which not only accentuates how strong its impact was on Balram, but also shows how it physically and mentally affected him. The physical consequence was, to faint while the mental result was the feeling of entrapment and a fear of meeting a similar fate. Both these mental consequences are also reflective of the psychological violence, imposed on Balram.

Another example that depicts physical violence in all its might is the description that Balram provides of his father's body. Balram's father, Vikram Halwai, was a "rickshaw-puller", who searched for work in different places like "Delhi, Calcutta and Dhanbad" and after hard work, returned home to his village "leaner, darker, angrier but with money" in his pocket. Balram introduces his father, as a respectable man who would not crouch or lower himself for anything. He builds an image of an honest and hardworking man and then gives a detailed observation of his father's body.

My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use  
in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around  
his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and  
scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and  
waist, reaching down below his hipbones into his buttocks. The  
story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen.  
(Adiga, 27)

This illustration builds a crude image of humanity. It amplifies the consequence of being poor in form of physical weakness and hardship in the shape of actual scars. Balram, in this example, compares his father's body to something inanimate like a rope and also to an animal. He objectifies and then dehumanizes his father in an attempt to show how the physical violence he faced turned him from human to a different species.

The "knotted rope" which is used to "pull" water is once again reflective of a forceful action. The word "curved", adds to the image of alteration, as a result of violence. The reference to the "dog's collar", creates the notion of subjugation and suppression, while also reducing his father's human form, to that of an animal. The "whip" once again acts as an indicator of forceful physical oppression, that leaves its marks behind in the form of "cuts and nicks and scars", which spread all over Balram's father's body, showing how far the violence expanded. The last sentence straightforwardly combines all the idea explained above, to reflect on the theme of social injustice, due to class differentiation. Once again, the word "sharp" gives an image of a weapon and builds on the notion physical violence.

Balram describes his father, as an ideal and a role model figure. He looked up to him and respected him for who he was. The fact that, someone who was an inspiration for Balram endured such violence shows how Balram was also indirectly influenced by that violence. He looked up to it and even somewhat respected it. The final sentence is a generalization made by Balram, which emphasizes on how violence had become a norm for him. He speaks of it in a neutral and detached tone, which further reflects on the idea of acceptance of physical violence.

Lastly, the fact that, both of Balram's parents faced such intense physical violence and he as a child, got to witness their struggle, further adds to his dilemma. He has grown up, surrounded by violence from all sides. Hence, its effect on him is obviously anticipated. He grows up to be a man who uses abundant animal imagery in order to dehumanize other people. He starts normalizing violent behavior, suggesting that, letting other people take advantage of oneself, in order to move forward in life is acceptable, as long as it reaps benefits. In the end, the final consequence of this physical violence, is the murder of his employer, Ashok Sharma, committed due to hatred for the upper class, a personal grudge and the deeply rooted acceptance of physical violence.

The next most prevalent type of violence in the novel is emotional and psychological violence. Such violence can be said to occur "when someone uses threats and causes fear in a person to gain control". This could occur by the aid of threats, stripping someone of their basic rights or control, emotionally blackmailing or pressuring a person or as a simple result of some other sort of violence (physical or financial).

Balram Halwai, suffers through psychological harm in such an extent that he grows up to have intense identity

crisis. He fails to define himself, in a category and struggles, to maintain his individuality in the face of the cruel society, that tries to crush him with the force of the collective identity. The root of his restlessness in his own skin can be considered the physical violence, he has witnessed throughout the childhood, which resulted in producing a great mental impact. It can also be blamed, on the emotional exploitation, Balram endured throughout in his life.

A case in point, when it comes to emotional exploitation, is Balram's childhood phobias of lizards and the Black Fort. Balram had already started experiencing a fear of entrapment, from the event of his mother's death as explained above. As he grew up, this fear developed into something stronger. It comes to surface in the incident in his school when a lizard was discovered in the closet of his school classroom. The sight of the lizard paralyzed Balram and when the other students noticed his fear, they deliberately held him and started to tease him by bringing the lizard closer to him. As a result, Balram fainted.

The other boys barely noticed. Until someone saw my face.

They gathered in a circle around me. Two of them pinned my hands behind my back and held my head still. Someone caught the thing in his hands, and began walking toward me with slow, exaggerated steps. Making no noise – only flicking its tongue in and out of its mouth – the lizard came closer and closer to my face. The laughter grew louder. I couldn't make a noise.

(Adiga, 28)

This instance, clearly portrays a situation where Balram is stripped of his freedom by force, from others. It reflects on physical violence, caused by children on another child, which clearly shows how violence of the adults transfers to the next generation, forming an unending cycle of insensitive and cruel humans. The behavior of other children reflects on the sort of sadism, shared by the collective society. This society seems to have entrapped Balram, triggering his deep seated fear of being unable to break free.

The physical constraint builds on the image of claustrophobia as a basic human right of freedom is taken away from Balram and he is left at the mercy of people, who find pleasure in his weakness. The exposure of his weakness acts as an embarrassing experience for a child and this episode of bullying, that wasn't stopped or ridiculed by the teacher, who slept in the classroom, leads to the picture of ignorance in the society.

The effect of this is quite destructive. Firstly, the paralysis and the fainting is the more immediate physical consequence that can be seen. Secondly the rise of feelings of helplessness, embarrassment and fear lead to mental trauma that can turn into serious insecurities and phobias in the future. Balram's insecurities include self-doubt which is later amplified as Ashok and Pinky laugh at his attempts at speaking English or ridicule him for being untidy. His phobia of lizards develops until his adulthood and it is also exploited by his grandmother, Kusum, who tells him that the world's greatest lizard lives in the Black Fort. This results in his fear of the fort itself and it is only when he grows older, that he is actually able to climb up to the fort and break free of his fear.

The other example that shows psychological violence is the reference to the Rooster Coop. Balram explains the servitude of the Indian servants to their masters by using an analogy of a rooster coop.

Never before in human history have so few owed so much too  
so many, Mr. Jiabao. A handful of men in this country have  
trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented, as  
intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude;  
servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation  
in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse.

(Adiga, 176)

The entire crux of the novel lies in the ideology of the coop, that is guarded by the threat of further violence and the loyalty of each servant that has been kept strong due to fear. The psychological trauma here lies in the fact that human beings who are born as equals become the victim of unjust hierarchy. No matter how much potential they have, they are reduced to mere slaves by the hands of those who are richer. These servants lose their status of a normal human being and hence give up their basic human rights like right of freedom and right of choice.

They are “trained” in a way that they consider themselves as inferior than their masters, adopting the roles that they are placed into with complacency. They start believing they “owe” their masters for everything that has been given to them. If they do not do as their master's wish, they will suffer the consequences of further violence. Hence violence guards violence itself. It helps build cages and put shackles on people. This mental violence is so strongly embedded in these people that they would never break free even if given the chance. They would endure suffering and never even try to end it because that is the way they are certain the world runs.

The effect of this coop of servitude is how it causes frustration, feelings of worthlessness and helplessness in Balram Halwai. He lets himself be exploited by his employers and never even thinks of betraying them until later. He accepts low pay, lets his masters mistreat him and poke fun at his expense. He is even ready to take the blame for the road accident that resulted in the death of a homeless child for Pinky, just because he is told to. His family is proud of him, because of this act of loyalty. Even when the case is not reported and Balram is out of danger, no one bothers to inform him. He is kept in a state of torturous unease and fear.

This is the sort of suppression that dominates the Indian society and it is this powerlessness that creates the obsession of taking control and possessing Ashok in Balram. It leads to the insanity, that gives Balram the courage to commit Ashok's murder. It is also this exact device, that leads to Balram's identity crisis, as all his life he is forced to be someone who he is not. Hence, the cycle of psychological violence leads to further violence by the hands of Balram himself.

The third type of violence is financial violence. Financial violence “occurs when someone controls a person's financial resources without the person's consent or misuses those resources”. This is seen in the novel time and time again. The theme of the rich versus is, the poor centres on the inequity of wealth in the society, which gives rich upper class the power to take advantage of the poor lower class.

This is seen as Balram's entire childhood passes in a village in deplorable conditions. His father's physique was also a result of financial violence as he struggled to earn and provide for his family. Furthermore, Balram had to be taken out of school and he worked in a tea shop since childhood because of lack of financial resources. This financial violence grows in magnitude as Balram grows up. When he works for Ashok, he is exploited once again.

The first case of such violence is when Kusum asks Balram, to send his salary home instead of using it on himself.

Kusum had decided that I could keep ninety rupees a month for myself: the rest would go straight to Kishan – who would send it straight to her, in the village. I gave him money every month through the black bars of the rear gate, and we would talk for a few minutes before the Nepali shouted, „That's enough – the boy has worked to do now!“ (Adiga, 68)

Through this example, it is evident that, Balram had to work hard and was not allowed to reap the benefits of his own labor. Adiga critiques the Indian family, as it binds an individual through blackmail and emotional exploitation, and uses him until every ounce of his potential is soaked up. The same had happened with Balram's father.

As the responsibility of the entire family fell on Balram's shoulders, he was forced to send his earning back home or else, he would be forced to go back to his village and abandon his dreams of city life. The reference to "black bars", creates an image of a prison. Despite being far from his family, Balram was still trapped due to his family and the rooster coop. His freedom was, as always, taken away from him. He had little leisure time to himself as his job was intensive and required hard work all day.

The fact that despite his labors, he did not get to keep the money emphasizes on injustice once again. The financial violence led to hatred and frustration. It accentuated the budding discontentment in him and also affected him psychologically as he grew apart from his family and left them to suffer a fate that resulted due to his own actions i.e. the murder of Ashok.

Financial violence then becomes apparent in another incident. When thoughts of betrayal first start infiltrating Balram's mind, he tries to confess it to Ashok, but Ashok interrupts him and assumes he wishes to ask for money for his wedding.

I saw him take out a thousand-rupee note, put it back, then take out a five hundred, then put it back, and take out a hundred. Which he handed to me. (Adiga, 258)

The inconsiderate attitude of all employers is reflective in Ashok's actions. Not only did he fail to listen to Balram, but he also failed to help him out generously. He started with a greater value of money but as his thought process progressed (as shown by the use of commas), he reduced the amount and miserly paid Balram a hundred rupee, fully aware that it was not close to enough. This shows how Ashok attributed Balram's value, as a human being to the amount he paid



him. The more he thought about him, the lesser he decided to pay him.

The attitude of the rich is very obvious through this as they view the poorer people as inferiors and treat them likewise. Once again, Adiga reflects on the injustice in the society. He also shows how this act is an act of violence as it portrays cruelty and inequality. It feels Balram feel inferior and he clearly understands Ashok's thought process, behind this action which also emotionally hurts his feelings.

Financial violence hence acts as a trigger for emotional pain, feelings of inferiority and also leads to internal aggravation. It is such violence that leads Balram to do small acts of corruption, such as using his master's car as a taxi to earn more, spitting on the seats of the car or urinating in the water he uses to wash the Stork's feet. It is also the above mentioned example of financial violence that seals the fate for Ashok as this final act pushes Balram, to finally commit the murder that he had earlier been uncertain about.

## CONCLUSIONS

Violence stems out into different types and each type is interlinked with one another. As Balram grows into an adult, all the injustices that he has undergone, affect him in different ways. They mould him into a cynical and emotionally damaged human being. The society feeds him and nurtures him on violence due to which everything he endures ends up accumulating and he finally experiences an outbreak which results in murder.

The following quote shows Balram's deliberation, as he weighed both sides of an argument, concerning stealing Ashok's money and running away, while looking at two puddles of spit.

### **The Left Hand Puddle of Spit Seemed to Say**

Your father wanted you to be an honest man.

Mr. Ashok does not hit you or spit on you like people did to your father.

Mr. Ashok pays you well, 4,000 rupees a month. He has been raising your salary without your even asking.

Remember what the Buffalo did to his servant's family. Mr. Ashok will ask his father to do the same to your family.

### **But the Right Hand Puddle of Spit Seemed to Say**

Your father wanted you to be a *man*.

Mr. Ashok made you take the blame when his wife killed that child on the road.

This is a pittance. You live in a city. What do you save? Nothing.

The very fact that Mr. Ashok threatens your family makes your blood boil! (Adiga, 246)

Here, some of the injustices, faced by Balram are summarized. Ranging from psychological to financial, the above examples only amplify what has been stressed on the novel, throughout. It is important to note that, Balram lists acts of exploitation, to decide if he should go through with his own form of corruption, hence, proving that, it is in fact violence itself that begets violence.

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